

**Testimony of Starr Sayres, Board of Directors, Connecticut Forest & Park Association, regarding H.B. 6557**

My name is Starr Sayres, Vice President of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA), an organization that has dedicated itself to conserving Connecticut's forests parks and trails for 116 years. The Association counts among its proud accomplishments its efforts to secure enactment of the original Landowner Liability Law in 1971.

As we have become increasingly aware with recent public attention to the recreational land liability controversy in Connecticut, the citizens of our state place high value upon ready access to neighborhood multiuse trails and recreational areas. Last July, over 700 people attended a public hearing in West Hartford to voice their dismay over the possible closing of MDC property to public use. This strong response affirms earlier findings in a 2005 DEP Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Study (SCORP), which revealed that over 93% of Connecticut households participate in land-based recreation.

There is significant evidence that average everyday hardworking folks measure the quality of their lives in part by their ability to enjoy time with their families engaged in outdoor activities. The State of Connecticut and its 169 municipalities are the chief providers of outdoor recreational resources in the state. To remove public accessibility to these wonderful outdoor resources at the local town and municipal levels would represent a very real erosion of that which is prized by the vast majority of Connecticut households.

Additionally, the degree to which our youth have direct personal and intimate experience of the outdoors speaks broadly to the development of a lifetime conservation ethic. I venture that many of our municipal recreational areas serve as the preeminent classroom for the creation of stewards of the future.

While sympathizing with the concerns of towns and municipalities following recent liability lawsuits, I submit that we either choose to live life with mistrust and fear, cowed by the actions of the few, or we conduct ourselves with courage, upholding the traditions of a free society as we make judgments and decisions. It is clear to me that by restoring the protection already enjoyed by private landowners to municipalities, we enshrine free public access to the bounteous lands we hold in common. I urge members of the Judiciary Committee to consider in favor of H.B. 6557 restoring liability protection for municipalities.

Thank you.